

To the Members of the Commerce Committee,

On Tuesday, March 1, 2022, during a Public Hearing, you will review Raised Bill No. 5263, An Act Concerning the Processing of Rabbits for Consumption. As a resident of the great state of Connecticut, I urge you to vote "No" on this bill because rabbit farming is neither humane nor good for the environment, and thus not good for Connecticut.

As I understand it, the proposed bill is intended to allow the breeding, keeping, and processing in Connecticut of rabbits for meat for consumption by consumers and retail food establishments--essentially adding rabbit "farming" to the types of livestock farming that is acceptable in the state. Although the proposed bill indicates that inspections of producers and rabbit processing facilities would occur (lines 5-7) consistent with applicable federal regulations (lines 7-10), there are not at present any federal regulations that require the inspection of rabbit production/processing facilities or the humane treatment of farmed rabbits. The regulations that currently exist around the humane treatment of farmed animals, such as the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (and its corresponding standards/guidelines in the Code of Federal Regulations at 9 C.F.R. Part 313) apply only to "livestock," and rabbits are not included in the regulatory definition of "livestock" (rabbits are considered "multi-use animals"). Due to the lack of protections for meat rabbits in federal regulations, these gentle creatures often end up living in filthy, inhumane conditions without veterinary care (including vaccinations), and can be slaughtered while still fully conscious. Animal abuse like this has no place in our state.

Environmental abuse has no place in Connecticut either. Although rabbit meat is considered one of the more "sustainable" meats, its carbon emissions per pound of protein are thought to be higher than that of pork and chicken. Production of about a half pound of rabbit meat can create as much as over two pounds of greenhouse gases. This makes rabbit meat production almost five times as polluting as the farming of lentils.

Additionally, the introduction of thousands of meat rabbits (in potentially unsanitary conditions and without veterinary care) to Connecticut increases the risk of the arrival of the Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) in our state. This highly contagious virus affects both domestic and wild rabbits (including the New England cottontail, the state's only native wild rabbit), and is usually fatal. Although Connecticut State Veterinarian, Dr. Jane Lewis, has announced the approval of an experimental vaccine against RHD for use in Connecticut by licensed veterinarians, as noted above, farmed rabbits are not required to have veterinary care or vaccinations. An outbreak of the virus at a rabbit production/processing facility in Connecticut could thus have dire consequences for rabbits throughout the state.

Although I myself do not eat meat, I do not take issue with those who do, provided the animals are well cared for during their short lives and are treated humanely during the slaughtering process, and the farming/processing has minimal environmental impact. "Farming" rabbits is not humane (under current federal regulations) or environmentally friendly, so I urge the Committee to reject Raised Bill No. 5263.

Respectfully,  
Kaitlyn Alessi  
198 W. Main Street  
Milford, CT 06460